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EDUCATION WEEK

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M. Campbash

Immigrant parent comforts child in temporary Miami shelter.

Dade County Seeks Federal Aid To Deal With Nicaraguan Influx

By Lisa Jennings

Saying they are being overwhelmed by a new and unexpected influx of Nicaraguan immigrants, Dade County, Fla., education officials have launched an intensive lobbying effort to bring more federal aid to Miami-area schools.

Dade County school-board members met with Florida's Congressional delegates in Washington last week to ask for help in dealing with what officials describe as "a crisis of major proportions."

In 1987-88, county schools coped with an unexpected 3,379 Nicaraguan students. Another 4,657 are predicted by the end of 1989. That means, Dade officials say, that their schools are having to absorb some 500 new Nicaraguan students each month this year.

Last month alone, however, 889 Nicaraguan students enrolled in the county, according to James Fleming, assistant superintendent for community and management services. Over all, enrollment in the district—the nation's fourth-largest—will rise to 266,583 this year, up from 253,984 in 1987-88.

In addition to problems with overcrowding, a shortage of bilingual programs, and racial tension, school officials say they face skyrocketing expansion costs.

Short-term temporary classroom space for the new students is expected to cost about $14 million. Some schools already

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Bush's Revisions Add $441 Million To E.D. Budget

Seeks 'Merit Schools,' Science Scholarships

By Julie A. Miller

WASHINGTON—President Bush last week unveiled 1990 budget revisions that would provide an additional $441 million for the Education Department, most of it for a series of new initiatives.

They include a "Merit Schools" program, awards for outstanding teachers, a science-scholarship program, an alternative-certification initiative, and a new magnet-schools program.

The Bush plan reportedly would rescind a Reagan Administration proposal to cut the school-lunch program. In addition, it calls for a child-care tax credit, increased funding for the National Science Foundation and the Head Start program, and a youth-service initiative that would cost $1 billion over four years.

In the Feb. 9 address to lawmakers, marking Mr. Bush's first speech before a joint session of the Congress, he called efforts to improve education "the most important competitiveness program of all," and reaffirmed his campaign pledge to be the "education President."

"We must reward excellence and cut through bureaucracy," he said. "We must help schools that need help the most. We must give choice to parents, students, teachers and principals, and we must hold all concerned accountable."

"In education," he declared, "we cannot tolerate mediocrity."

The $441 million Mr. Bush proposed add-

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Judge Finds Bias In Scholarships Based on Scores

By Mark Walsh

A federal judge's ruling that the awarding of New York State scholarships based on Scholastic Aptitude Test scores discriminates against female students could lead to other legal challenges to the test, some experts predicted last week.

Judge John M. Walker ruled Feb. 3 that New York's use of the S.A.T. as the sole criterion for awarding its Regents and Empire State Scholarships discriminated against females because they traditionally score lower than males on the standardized college-admission test.

Longtime critics who claim that the test is inherently biased against women and minorities hailed the judge's opinion as a landmark ruling that would open the door to challenges to other current uses of the test.

"The case is the first challenging any standardized test based on gender discrimination," said Isabelle Katz Pinzler, director of the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union and the lead counsel for the plaintiffs.

The suit was brought against the New York Department of Education by 10 female students and two organizations, the Girls Clubs of America and the National Organization for Women.

"This all helps build the momentum to have the tests overhauled or totally discarded," said Robert A. Schaeffer, a spokesman for the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, the chief critic of the S.A.T.

But the College Board, the organization that oversees the admissions test, and the Educational Testing Service, the organization that develops and administers it, said the judge's ruling was limited in scope.

"By this order, the judge is clearly not taking any kind of anti-S.A.T. stand, but has taken the same position that E.T.S and the College Board have taken on the proper use

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Escalating Health-Insurance Costs Eroding Education Pay and Funding

By Nancy Mathis

The rapid escalation of health-insurance costs is putting an increasing budget strain on states and school districts, analysts say, and eroding for many teachers the hard-won salary gains of recent years.

With rate increases of from 30 percent to 50 percent not uncommon, union leaders and other officials said last week they fear many school employees eventually could be priced out of insurance programs if present trends continue unabated.

"The problem of getting and keeping health insurance is growing worse and worse," said John Coles, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers.

Though the health-cost crisis is affecting all Americans, experts say it strikes particularly hard at workers in the precollegiate sector. Private insurance carriers, they say, consider school employees to be a high-risk workforce.

The industry's wariness is based on two demographic factors: The aging of the teaching force, which means more members more prone to use medical coverage; and the high proportion among teachers of younger women, a group considered to be a higher insurance risk because of the possibility of pregnancy.

Teachers also have the time and the know-how to use their benefits, some ana-

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South Carolina Considering 'Flexibility' for High-Scoring Schools

By Ellen Flax

South Carolina's governor and key lawmakers are advancing proposals that would release schools with a record of superior academic achievement from compliance with numerous state regulations.

Experts say the concept appears to be one of the most far-reaching attempts yet made by a state to encourage local restructuring of schools, both in terms of the number of schools involved and in the sweep of state rules that would be lifted.

In his State of the State Address last month, Gov. Carroll A. Campbell Jr. unveiled the broad outlines of a plan to exempt nearly one-fourth of South Carolina's 1,100 schools from virtually all state regulations.

Schools would gain the special "flexibility" status, Mr. Campbell's aides said, if their students earned high marks on the state's standardized tests, as compared with other schools whose students have a similar socioeconomic profile. According to a briefing paper, schools would lose the special treatment only if their students' scores "decline significantly."

A slightly modified proposal introduced in the Senate last week would make it more difficult for schools to maintain the special designation. According to the bill, these schools would be exempt from regulations "including, but not limited to, regulations on class scheduling, class structure, and staffing."

Senate staff members estimate that 291 schools would qualify for exemptions under that bill. A similar proposal was expected to be introduced in the legislature's lower chamber this week.

Neither the Governor's nor the Senate's plan specifies whether schools would have to apply for exemptions, or would be granted waivers automatically.

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Learning Laboratories
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Hunt Backs Off
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Proprietary Problems
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Abuse in Indian Schools
Federal officials failed to respond adequately to incidents of sexual abuse of Indian children by reservation-school teachers, a Senate panel was told last week. **Page 15.**

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ACROSS THE NATION

STATES

Paddling Bruises Are Not Proof Of Child Abuse, Florida Judge Rules

In a case involving disciplinary actions taken by two school principals, a Florida judge has ruled that bruises caused by paddling do not constitute proof of child abuse.

The Jan. 25 ruling challenges a Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services policy that classifies as a child abuser anyone who inflicts punishment on a child that leaves a visible bruise lasting 24 hours.

In his opinion, Hillsborough Circuit Judge Thomas A. Miller ordered that state health officials strike the names of the principals—Martha F. Hood and Paul E. Rich—from a statewide registry of child abusers. He said their actions did not merit the charge of child abuse.

The two school officials had sued the agency last summer, after learning that the state action would disqualify them from working with children.

Corporal punishment is legal in Florida schools.

Steven Konicki, a spokesman for the health department, said officials there were seeking another hearing on the matter.

■ **Wyoming school officials cannot use a 1979 law to bar students without immunizations from attending school,** according to the state attorney general.

In an opinion written last month for the state department of health and social services, Attorney General Joseph B. Meyer said school administrators can only legally exclude unvaccinated students if there is an epidemic that could be prevented by the vaccinations.

The statute requires all students age 10 or younger to provide immunization records within 120 days of entering a public school.

However, Mr. Meyer discovered, language that also would have permitted the exclusion of students who did not comply was removed when legislators amended the law last year.

"On the one hand, we have to insist that students be immunized," said Rowena Heckert, a senior assistant attorney general. "On the other hand, we can't keep them out of school if they don't."

DISTRICTS

Connecticut Judge Backs Waterbury Desegregation Plan

A Connecticut judge has approved the framework of a plan that could resolve the first lawsuit filed by the state board of education against a local district for violations of its guidelines for racial balance in schools.

The settlement approved by Superior Court Judge James D. O'Connor hinges on approval by the Waterbury city government of a proposed site for a new magnet school that would help desegregate the district's only racially identifiable school.

The state board first cited the Waterbury system in 1984 for racial imbalances in four schools. Four years of negotiations resolved the problems in three schools. Last fall, however, the city's board of aldermen blocked an agreement to settle the remaining issue by constructing a new school that would have enrolled students from two existing facilities.

Once a site for the proposed magnet school has been determined, district administrators will have to gain the state board's approval for a new desegregation plan, a state official said last week.

Tulsa Schools Facing 'Catch 22' On State Class-Size Requirement

The Tulsa, Okla., school system faces a $1.6-million fine for failing to meet state limits on class size.

The district has been unable to satisfy the requirement, school officials say, because it has lost $17.5 million in state aid in the past eight years.

Superintendent Larry Zenke said the district was urging lawmakers to authorize the education department to issue waivers to Tulsa and 29 other districts that exceeded a 20-to-1 pupil-teacher ratio in the early elementary grades.

The district is "in a classic 'Catch 22' situation," Mr. Zenke said last week.

He said increasing class sizes was the last resort used by the district after making deep cuts in custodial, maintenance, and other support staffs.

Finally, Mr. Zenke explained, the district reduced its teaching force by 300, and thereby went over the state limit.

If the district is forced to pay the fine later this year, it may have to increase class sizes even more to pay the penalty. That in turn could increase the penalty for the next year, Mr. Zenke noted.

State education officials sympathize with the plight of the 30 districts, but are required by law to enforce the class-size mandate, said Sharon Lease, a spokesman for the education department.

■ **The superintendent and three other employees of the Goose Creek (Tex.) Consolidated School District have pleaded not guilty to charges of misappropriation of funds.**

The four were suspended from their posts after being indicted last month on theft charges. They include Superintendent William Kennedy; Charles Closs, associate superintendent for building maintenance and operations; Michael Stephens, construction supervisor; and Matthew Closs, a district worker who is the son of Charles Closs.

Investigators said they believed funds and property in the Houston-area district had been misused for more than a decade. The employees apparently felt that "whatever belonged to the school district was there for their personal use," said Terry Wilson, an assistant district attorney in Harris County.

■ **A high-school football coach in Prince George's County, Md., has been suspended from teaching for allegedly requesting a student to bring automatic weapons to school** for use as props in a publicity photograph.

Michael A. Pearson, a physical-education teacher at Oxon Hill High School, was placed on paid administrative leave last week. Brian J. Porter, a spokesman for the district, said the action was taken because of "an extraordinarily serious breach of school security," in which the coach allegedly arranged for his team's "top guns" to pose with the weapons.

The unloaded guns were confiscated late last month by school security officers acting on a tip from a parent who had seen students handling them near an athletic field.

Mr. Porter said the weapons were a machine pistol and a bayonet-equipped AK-47, similar to the one used by a gunman last month to kill five children at an elementary school in Stockton, Calif.

■ **Miami should help community groups build day-care centers in public parks,** a city official there argues.

Victor De Yurre, a city commissioner, originally proposed to allow private, profit-making child-care companies to rent building sites in 10 city parks.

When that idea attracted little interest from day-care companies, Mr. De Yurre suggested instead that nonprofit groups

Air Time for High-School Athletics

The national group representing state high-school athletic associations has entered negotiations with several cable-television firms over a possible multimillion-dollar contract to broadcast high-school basketball games and possibly other sports events.

Warren Brown, assistant executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations, said last week that the group was "interested in developing high-school sports programming and has been in contact with several cable networks."

"Our interest is in promoting the positive values of high-school sports, and we believe that this a good way to do it," he added.

Although Mr. Brown declined to say how much such a contract might be worth, recent similar transactions suggest that it could net the association millions of dollars.

Last month, the ESPN cable-television company won a $400-million, four-year contract to provide coverage of major-league baseball games. Last December, CBS Inc. agreed to pay $1.1 billion under a similar baseball contract.

Mr. Brown declined to say how the revenues from such a contract might be distributed among the association's member groups. He also declined to comment on published reports that the contract might lead to the creation of a national high-school basketball tournament similar to the one conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

A spokesman for SportsChannel America, a New York-based cable firm with 6.2 million subscribers, confirmed that the company "has had discussions" with the high-school group.

"We've done about five high-school basketball games this season and we feel they've been successful," said the spokesman, Daniel Martinson.

"I can only say we feel there are great possibilities in televising high-school basketball," he added.

SportsChannel recently paid the National Hockey League $15 million for an exclusive three-year contract to broadcast regular-season, all-star, and championship games, Mr. Martinson said.

—T.M.

could be offered yearly leases on park land for a token sum.

■ **Schools Chancellor Richard R. Green of New York City wants day-care centers to be established at three junior high schools.**

In his budget request for the city school system, Mr. Green sought $168,957 to expand the district's Living for the Young Family Through Education program.

LYFE operates day-care centers for adolescent mothers in 21 high schools.

Citing an "alarming" rise in parenting rates among teens, Mr. Green argued that the schools should provide "leadership and structure" for young mothers to help them complete their education.

According to city social-service officials, 288 girls under age 15 had babies in 1987.

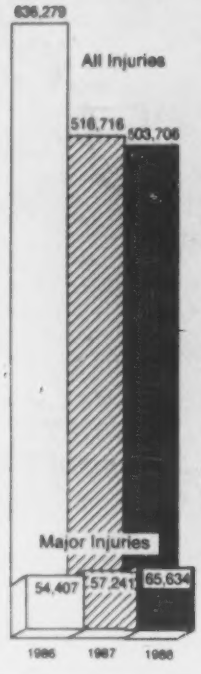
If funding is approved, LYFE will provide child care, counseling, health, and nutrition classes for junior-high mothers.

■ **Illegal transfers by two students have cost a Kentucky high school 11 girls' basketball victories and five football victories, including a district championship.**

Belfry High School in Pike County was forced to forfeit its victories because the student-athletes had given inaccurate information about their eligibility when they transferred from schools in West Virginia. They did not actually live in the district, said Billy Wise, executive assistant commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association.

DIMENSIONS

High-School Football Injuries



Although high-school football players sustained fewer injuries last year than in the previous two years, the number of serious injuries was up substantially, according to a survey by the National Athletic Trainers' Association Inc.

The study, which the association described as the most thorough ever conducted, found that "major" injuries—defined as those preventing a player from participating for three weeks or more—constituted 13 percent of all injuries last year, compared with 8.6 percent in 1986.

Some 14,000 of the injuries, the study estimated, were serious enough to require surgery—most often, on the knee.

The survey also found that 36 percent of all players suffered at least one injury serious enough to put them out of action for a day or more.

None of the schools surveyed had experienced a football-related death in the past three years. The study noted, however, that other research has shown that an average of two dozen players each year die or suffer a catastrophic injury while participating in the sport.

Further information on the survey can be obtained from John LeGear, director of public relations, N.A.T.A., P.O. Box 3548, Oak Park, Ill. 60303.

SOURCE: National Athletic Trainer's Assn., Inc. (1988)

UPDATE

■ **Gov. Guy Hunt of Alabama moved last week to block the sale of a Montgomery television station to the state's teacher and public-employee retirement systems.** *(See Education Week, Feb. 8, 1989.)*

Mr. Hunt filed a petition with the Federal Communications Commission, asking for a halt to the proposed sale of WSFA-TV to RSA Media Corporation, a subsidiary of the retirement funds.

The Governor is locked in a political dispute over the sale with Paul Hubbert, the powerful head of the Alabama Education Association and chairman of the teachers' retirement-system board.

Mr. Hunt expressed concern about the freedom of the station's news operation, and said he was "deeply troubled that the financial expectations of state employees and teachers will be placed in jeopardy" by the deal.

■ **Local empowerment will be a key strategy for tackling the Detroit school system's financial, educational, and managerial problems,** according to a declaration adopted by the school board last week.

The board has not adopted a specific model for school-based management in the district. But it plans to ask from 20 to 40 schools to develop such plans and implement them by next fall, according to David Olmstead, one of four new members elected on a reform platform last fall. *(See Education Week, Nov. 16, 1988.)*

The board also will ask teachers to negotiate a "model" contract similar to those adopted in Dade County, Fla., Pittsburgh, and Rochester, N.Y., he said. To help to reduce a projected budget deficit, he added, the board will ask teachers to reopen contract negotiations rather than press forward with an arbitration procedure.

Most board members think a comprehensive reform plan—including new collective-bargaining agreements—should be in place before voters are asked to support higher taxes for the system, he noted.

PEOPLE

■ Being the coach of a boys' high-school basketball team has given **Debbie McIntosh** more than just the chance to show six-foot forwards how to do the "pick-and-roll." It has also thrust her into a media spotlight that shows no sign of dimming.

Since taking charge of the varsity squad at Prospect Heights High School in Brooklyn, N.Y., last year, Ms. McIntosh has turned a losing team into one said to have a chance of winning the state championship.

After her story was covered by the local press, Ms. McIntosh's media profile did a "fast break" last fall, when CBS's "60 Minutes" program aired a segment about her.

Since then, magazine writers, Hollywood producers, and book publishers have put a "full-court press" on Ms. McIntosh. In the next few months, she and her team will be the subject of stories in *Ebony*, *Parade*, and *Sports Illustrated's* youth magazine. She also is continuing to look over the movie and book offers that have poured in.

■ Quick action by **Suryanarayana Chittilla**, a chemistry teacher at Durham High School in North Carolina, saved his students from possible serious injury.

But Mr. Chittilla's bravery may also have led to the loss of much of his own eyesight.

During a class late last month, some water accidently got into a vial of sodium metal, forming a potentially explosive mixture. Mr. Chittilla grabbed the vial and raced for the nearest exit. Just as he reached for the door, however, the vial exploded.

Mr. Chittilla is being treated at the Duke Medical Center for severe burns to his face and eyes, and the chances for a full recovery are still uncertain, said Barbara Ellis, principal of the high school. However, Mr. Chittilla has blurred vision in one eye and doctors are reporting some signs of improvement, she said.

In recognition of the teacher's "very heroic effort," the school has established a fund to assist him and his family, Ms. Ellis noted.

RESEARCH AND REPORTS

Chiefs Release Compilation Of State Education Indicators

The Council of Chief State School Officers last week released its second annual 50-state summary of education statistics.

The report, designed to allow comparisons between states and groups of states, contains information on student characteristics, education spending, and policies in such areas as instructional time, graduation requirements, and teacher preparation.

Also included are data on each state's economy, school-age population, minority enrollment, and other characteristics.

The council noted plans to include standardized state data on student attendance and dropout rates in future reports.

Copies of "State Education Indicators 1988" are available for $12.50 each from the C.C.S.S.O.'s State Education Assessment Center, 400 North Capitol St., N.W., Suite 377, Washington, D.C. 20001.

RadioActivity

High-school students in the five towns surrounding the Pilgrim nuclear-power plant in Plymouth, Mass., may soon be receiving hands-on lessons in the control of radioactivity.

The state's department of public health has suggested that the students, with the help of their science departments, monitor radiation levels in the area surrounding their schools.

There are six secondary schools within the 10-mile emergency-evacuation zone of the controversial plant, which is slowly restarting operations after being shut for more than two years.

The project would be underwritten by Boston Edison Company, the plant's owner.

If the idea is approved by school officials and local governments, students will monitor instruments that measure changes in radiation levels and compare them with average amounts of naturally occurring background radiation.

Schools that take part in the program would receive a stipend, which could be used to pay participating students.

Students would spend the first two to three years of the program, which could begin as early as this spring, trying to establish average background levels, said Robert Hallisey, director of the department's radiation-control program.

Students will not be exposed to radiation during any part of the program, Mr. Hallisey claimed, and will be instructed what to do if a reading shows an excessively high level.

Mr. Hallisey said he had not heard of any opposition to the proposal, but noted that he had not yet discussed it with all of the schools' officials. —E.F.

MILESTONES

■ **Sister Ann Christine Heintz**, a Roman Catholic nun who founded a student-operated newspaper organization and wire service geared to high-school students, is dead at 58.

As a high-school journalism teacher in Chicago, Sister Heintz in 1976 helped start Youth Communication. The organization began publishing *New Expression*, a student-run paper serving high-school students in the Chicago area.

The paper, which today has a circulation of about 80,000, covers such issues as school curricula, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy.

The organization, which also publishes student-run papers in seven other cities, involves some 500 students in various capacities, according to Craig Trygstad, executive director of the group's national center in Washington.

In 1982, the organization began the Youth News Service, a Washington-based wire service for student papers.

Corrections

The location of the National School Safety Center was incorrectly reported in the Jan. 25 issue. The center is located at Pepperdine University, 16830 Ventura Blvd., Suite 200, Encino, Calif. 91436.

The official name of a Pennsylvania teachers' organization was cited incorrectly in the Jan. 11 issue. The group is the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Questions Raised on Efficacy of Stiffer Math, Science Graduation Requisites

By Lynn Olson

This decade's raised high-school graduation requirements have primarily affected low- and middle-achieving students, who are taking more science and mathematics courses as a result, a new study has found.

But the report by the Center for Policy Research in Education, a federally funded research consortium, questions whether the new courses are as challenging or as rigorous as they could be.

Most of the added classes are for noncollege-bound students, it found, and are concentrated at the remedial, general, or basic level.

Thus, the report argues, they do little to rectify the stratified curriculum that already exists in most high schools.

"The problem is that the extra courses may not fulfill the reform objectives very well," said William H. Clune, Voss-Bascom Professor of Law at the University of Wisconsin Law School and primary author of the report.

"Insofar as the reformers had educational objectives, they intended to produce a more uniform academic curriculum and raise student achievement," Mr. Clune said. "And the problem is that a couple of extra low-level courses doesn't move very far in that direction."

A Popular Reform

The report, by Mr. Clune and two associates—Paula White and Janice Patterson—provides the first in-depth study of how selected schools across the country have carried out mandates to increase academic requirements.

State mandates on the number of required "core" courses have been the most common reform of the 1980's.

Since the beginning of the decade, 45 states have either specified for the first time, or increased, the total number of courses required for high-school graduation.

Of those states, 42 increased course requirements for math or science, or both. At least 18 added language-arts requirements; and about half raised social-studies requirements.

The report focused on changes in graduation requirements in six states—Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. It also studied a select number of schools and districts in each state, except Minnesota.

In each instance, school administrators, teachers, school-board members, union leaders, and parent representatives were asked for their views on the reforms.

In addition, the study examined actual changes in course offerings in four states—Arizona, California, Florida, and Pennsylvania.

Bypassed High Achievers

In general, the report found, affluent schools and districts and college-bound students were not affected by the reforms, because they already met or exceeded the new curriculum requirements.

Instead, the reforms were felt most by noncollege-bound students: those traditionally considered low- or middle-achievers.

Approximately 27 percent of these students took an extra math course, and 34 percent an extra science course, as a result of the reforms, the study found. Many also took a new or added course in social studies.

Given the relatively low number of math and science courses previously taken by such students, the study noted, the increases represent a "potentially significant increment of educational content."

But it cautioned that most of the new math courses were focused on a relatively low level of skills, such as general math, remedial math, consumer math, algebra, geometry, and math applications.

And although science courses were added in such traditional subjects as physical science, chemistry, physics, and biology, the additions also tended to be at the "basic" level.

The 'Major Casualty'

Respondents complained that the new requirements substantially reduced the number of courses that students took in home economics, industrial arts, physical education, vocational education, business, psychology, and the performing arts.

"Vocational courses were the major casualty of the increased academic coursetaking," Mr. Clune said. "We saw evidence that the new requirements made it difficult to complete logical, and even required, sequences of vocational courses."

"*A Nation at Risk*, the so-called bible of the reform movement, spoke of eliminating weak academic courses in favor of higher-quality academic courses and vocational courses," he added. "In some cases, the real impact [of these reforms] may have been the reverse. You got low-quality academic courses replacing higher-quality vocational ones. But we don't have the precise data to support that."

Increased Dropout Rate?

Respondents also worried that the increased standards would push marginal students out of school, although they admitted that they lacked data to support that view.

The report itself cited previous research findings linking higher standards to lower mean dropout rates, and indicating that graduation rates are improving slightly nationwide.

A longitudinal study of students in Dade County, Fla., for example, found a significant decline in the dropout rate during the same period that students' academic course load was rising.

"I actually can't explain the discrepancy between school-level perceptions of dropout problems as a result of these higher standards and the lack of objective data," Mr. Clune said.

"It's possible that we'll see the [dropout] rates go up later on because there's been some sort of lag," he said. "Also, school people may have a bias toward seeing the problems of higher standards and not seeing the benefits, such as increased motivation for students resulting from more interesting material. There is research supporting that type of effect."

'Watered Down' Courses

The study did not gather systematic data on the actual content of the new courses. But it did find scattered evidence of attempts to "water down" the curriculum.

The evidence included shortened class periods, courses with repetitious material, science "labs" held in regular classrooms, and some inadequately qualified teachers.

In some instances, students were also steered toward less-demanding classes. In two Florida districts, for example, high-school counselors reported advising students in danger of failing to take easier courses in order to meet the new standards. The counselors said that in the past they had advised such students to take more-challenging classes in order to stretch themselves.

In two of four Pennsylvania districts studied, students were allowed to substitute vocational courses for their academic requirements. One district was considering substituting courses like "nursing math, baking math, and carpentry math."

"Lacking systematic data, we cannot tell how common such practices were," the study noted. "But there are deeper reasons for doubting that the new courses were the best possible."

First, it said, schools typically offer low- and middle-achieving students "dull, factual, repetitive material," and there was no reason to believe that most schools changed their tactics in adding the new courses.

Second, designing the right kinds of academic courses for such students is extremely difficult, the report argued. But states focused almost no attention on the need to upgrade instruction at the same time that they increased course requirements.

Moreover, state mandates included almost no provisions for technical assistance to either districts or schools.

California offered the one exception in the study. The state specifically created "bridge" courses that would allow students to upgrade their skills and make the transition from the general to the academic track.

'Streamlined Core Curriculum'

In general, Mr. Clune concluded, the reforms produced mixed results: Schools added the best courses they could manage for low- and middle-achieving students on short notice. But they fell "far short" of providing real academic rigor.

He suggested that to attain the latter goal, policymakers would have to take a serious look at the content of academic courses, and not just their labels.

"At a certain level of requirements, you begin to get high costs and unclear benefits," he said. "States with very high graduation requirements may be choosing quantity over quality. At some point, students lose all of their electives and the opportunity to take vocational courses. Or they spend a lot of time retaking courses they have failed."

Instead of adding more and more course requirements, Mr. Clune advised, states should pare back the number of credits required for graduation and work to strengthen the content of the courses they do require.

In particular, he advocated the creation of a "streamlined core curriculum" for all students. Within that curriculum, he said, states should create a very specific set of learning objectives that focus on higher-order skills and that are as "demanding as possible" for everyone.

"Ways must be found to identify the most important part of the core curriculum and to make sure students reach at least that level," according to the report. "States, districts, and schools need to design workable paths from remedial and weak courses to more demanding ones."

New Look at Voc. Ed.

Mr. Clune also suggested that the role of vocational education "deserves a second look." It can be a "superior method" of introducing students to both basic and higher-order academic skills, he said, and can also be "an excellent means of motivating some students to stay in school."

The Center for Policy Research in Education is a federally funded research consortium that includes Rutgers University, Michigan State University, Stanford University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of CPRE's institutional partners.

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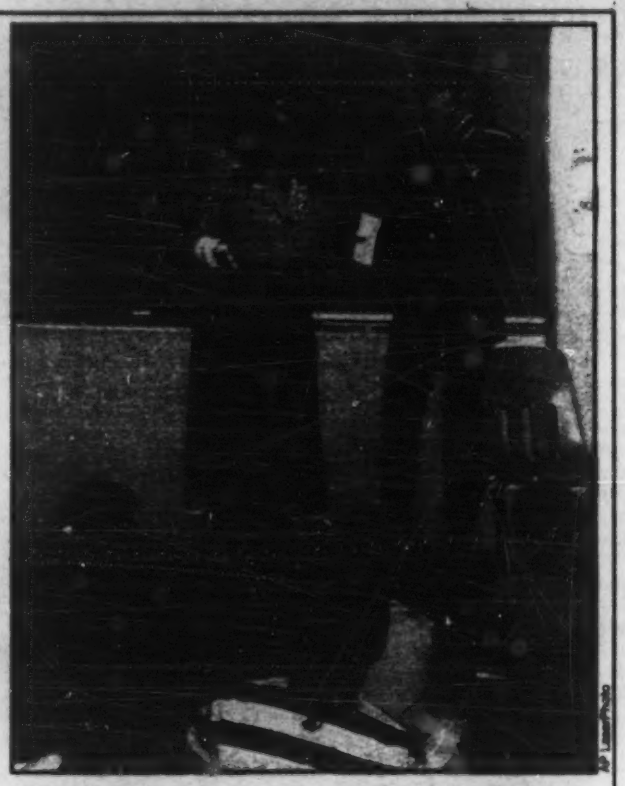

AP/Laserphoto

LIVE AID: The singer Michael Jackson last week made a surprise visit to Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, Calif., where a gunman killed five students and then shot himself last month.

Survey Respondents' Views On New Graduation Requirements

Type of Response	Number of Respondents* States	Districts	Schools
Advantages			
Raised test scores	2	3	5
Better college preparation	3	9	13
Better employment preparation	2	3	2
Improved quality of instruction	3	3	5
Provided students with more basic skills (broader background)	3	3	4
Disadvantages			
Delayed graduation	5	5	5
Increased dropout rate	4	13	17
Increased failure rate	5	7	8
Reduced electives (number offered and number students could take)	5	10	19
Lack of funds	3	3	4
Reduced vocational offerings	5	9	11
Reduced fine-arts offerings	2	3	4
Hurt lower-achieving students	5	9	16
Reduced choices and options for students	4	6	8
Reduced flexibility in scheduling	4	4	5
Reduced attendance	5	5	6
Increased discipline problems	2	2	3
Lack of teachers, space, equipment	5	7	8
Raised anxiety of teachers	1	4	6
Raised anxiety of students	3	5	6
Increased summer-school enrollment	5	4	6
Increased workload for teachers	2	4	6
Watered down the curriculum	2	2	2
Identified as Both Advantages and Disadvantages			
Hired more teachers	3	4	6
Challenged students (students had to work harder)	6	7	9
More exposure to science and math	5	11	13
Increased standards and teacher expectations of students	3	3	3

*Sample for this table is 5 states, 19 districts, and 32 schools.

SOURCE: Center for Policy Research in Education